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Sam Hall Kaplan

Out-of-Towners Win L. A. Design Plums

These are good times for architecture in Los Angeles, but not necessarily for local architects.

Judging from letters and telephone calls, and comments heard at various gatherings, there seems to be a healthy rise in the design consciousness of developers, public officials and citizens.

This, in turn, has prompted a healthy questioning of proposed projects, such as the effect of their height, scale, massing and details on the street scape and skyline, as well as simply how they function.

At last the realization appears to be sinking in that, as Winston Churchill once declared, "We shape our buildings, thereafter they shape us."

The rise in design consciousness also has prompted many developers to seek name architects, the so-called superstars, who they presumably feel, are more sensitive to the design considerations, while, not incidentally, lending their projects some distinction to aid marketing.

Architectural firms selected recently for major projects in Los Angeles include I.M. Pei, Philip Johnson & John Burgee, Kohn Pedersen Fox, Hardy, Holzman Pfeiffer, and Richard Meier, all of New York; Murphy/Jahn and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill of Chicago; Morris/ Aubry of Houston, Arthur Erickson of Vancouver, and Arata Isozaki of Tokyo.

What has been happening is that many of the best projects proposed recently in Los Angeles—the towering office complexes and major museums—"commissions to kill for," according to a local architect—are going to outside firms.

The situation gnaws away at the egos of many Los Angeles architects, who feel, given the opportunity, that they can produce designs of comparable quality, if not more sensitive to the local city scape.

The reasons for the preference of superstars from outside are varied and debatable, at least according to an informal survey I have been conducting. They also are revealing of a perplexing corner into which some local architects have designed themselves and others, no thanks to parochial prejudices of taste makers.

The issue is simmering and as various projects begin taking form should begin to boil. When cooked and flavored, we shall be ready with knife and fork.

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Meanwhile, intent on improving the status of local architects, the Los Angeles chapter of the American Institute of Architects has laid out an ambitious blueprint for the coming year.

Announced by the chapter's new president, Mark Hall, at his installation last weekend, the plan includes encouraging more public participation by creating an architectural foundation open to all interested persons, holding exhibits at the Museum of Science and Industry, and initiating an intern program.

The plan also calls for the chapter to become more involved in public issues through a government relations program and by taking positions on various urban design issues "causing concern today." Among the issues listed were the proliferation of mini-convenience shopping centers and the potential for creation of special-image boulevards.

With 1,700 members, the chapter is the largest in the United States, and indeed could be a very influential interest group on the local scene. The potential is certainly there.

However, for a variety of boring reasons that plague such professional associations, the chapter just has not seemed able to get its act together in recent years to assert its collective talent. As a result, the chapter, the reputation of its members and the city itself have suffered.

Hall and the newly installed officers and directors of the chapter seem to be well aware of the situation and determined to do something about it, once they and their predecessors stop congratulating each other. The chapter's gatherings do have a problem of running on and on and on. You would think the gatherings were a construction project, with no penalty clause tacked on to the scheduling.

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The national A.I.A. also is attempting a new program to bridge the gap between the public and the design professional by establishing something it calls the Forum for Architecture. "We've called it *Forum* because it truly will function as a forum for the discussion of issues and trends in American architecture," declared a statement of purpose in the organization's breezy, first newsletter.

The question is whether in their discussion, the professionals will be able to stop pontificating, and for a change, listen to the public, the users of the environments they have designed.

It would be a shame if the Forum turned out to be just another public relations effort of the A.I.A. Given the organization's past history and regional prejudices, one cannot help but be wary.

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No pretensions weight down "Richard Meltzer's Guide To The Ugliest Buildings of Los Angeles" (Illuminati, 8812 Pico Blvd., Los Angeles, CA. 90035. $3.95), a delightful if arbitrary collection of his brief, explosive architectural reviews that have appeared from time to time in The Los Angeles Reader. So what if a few pages have been inserted upside down and the writing is awkward. Meltzer's vision is sharp and his emotions pure. What more do you want from a critic?

Terence M. Green

Swedes "See Red"—Log Homes, That Is

Did you ever wonder why so many buildings in Sweden are painted red? (No, this isn't a game of Trivial Pursuit.)

The reason is that they are log houses and Sweden is the original home of a type of red paint that has been in use there since the early

Alternative Shelter

1600s. And it's not trivial because the conventional wisdom is that log houses should not be painted—but hearken to Doris Muir, editor/publisher of the quarterly Log Home Guide for Builders & Buyers.

"After years spent warning log builders and log home owners never, repeat, NEVER to paint their logs, we were won over on our visit to Scandinavia by Sweden's Falun Red paint, which covers virtually every log or timber building in that country.

"Falun Red overcomes our previous objections because it allows the wood to breathe, it doesn't hide the grain, it is fire-resistant, it preserves the wood from its twin enemies, rot and insect pests, and it's so much like a stain rather than a paint that it can't crack or blister and thus lodge water."

That particular issue of the Guide (fall, 1984) has an extensive gallery of pictures of log buildings in Sweden, Norway and Finland, including the restored Holmenkollen Park Hotel in Oslo and an inn at Orsas, near Borlange, Sweden, that was raised in 1440 and is called the world's oldest commercial log building. Some of the logs date from the 10th Century and the inn is thought to have been the hiding place of King Gustav Vasa (reigned 1523-1560) from his Danish enemies.

The paint gets its name from Sweden's ancient copper mine of Falun, since its main ingredient was a byproduct of the metal production. Muir was told that the paint gets its color from iron oxide and its preservative qualities from salicic acid, while it is completely free of gypsum, which is present in many similar paints and is both useless and harmful.

In her article, Muir also reprints a do-it-yourself recipe for the paint that was printed in the Swedish magazine Household in 1762.

Muir Publishing Co. is a Canadian firm but it has a distribution office at P. O.Box 37, West Rutland, Vt. 05777. The guide's editorial office is in the new Log Home Guide Information Center, Exit 447, Interstate 40, Hartford, Tenn. 37753 (near Knoxville).

Editor Muir is an enthusiast on her subject. She estimates that about 30,000 log homes are built each year, from hand-built cabins to traditional and conventional homes, many in the luxury class. She says that 85% of log-home buyers are acquiring year-around homes, not vacation cabins, and she expects 10% of all single-family housing starts to be log homes by the end of this decade.

Work Starting on Pacoima Youth Club

Construction begins this week on the $1.7-million Boys and Girls Club of San Fernando Valley on a three-acre site on Glenoaks Boulevard near Van Nuys Boulevard in Pacoima.

Designed by William M. Bray, AIA & Associates, Encino, the facility is the first new Boys Club of America facility ever to be built in the San Fernando Valley, according to LeRoy Chase, executive director of the Boys and Girls Club of San Fernando Valley. The club's existing facilities are at 13421 Van Nuys Blvd., Pacoima.

The general contractor is McLaughlin Construction of Lancaster, and completion is scheduled by this fall. The 26,000-square-foot, energy efficient multipurpose building is expected to serve the social and recreational activities of about 2,500 boys- and girls-club members between the ages of 7 and 17, Chase said.

Bray's design includes 43 skylights to bathe the facility in adequate natural light and reduce energy costs. In addition, all window glass will be tinted bronze to assure further energy savings.

A gymnasium/basketball court will feature free-floating maple flooring. The club facility includes an all-purpose meeting room with a theater and a projection booth. Other rooms will house activities ranging from exercise to computers to crafts. Outdoor recreational facilities include a lighted athletic field and handball courts.

The exterior of the contemporary Spanish-style building is white stucco accented by a blue tile roof.

Boys and Girls Club of San Fernando Valley, designed by William M. Bray, AIA & Associates, is under construction on Glenoaks Boulevard near Van Nuys Boulevard in Pacoima.

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